Poor Dorothy:
A Postmodern Historiographical Introduction
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Dorothy — missile to a target — walked carefully to the supermarket.

This statement is a rich narrative of triumph. This statement is a series of signifiers that forces recall of mental manifestations and preconceived notions. This statement is a group of referents, directly relating to other referents, which in turn relate to others, creating a universe encapsulated by language barriers and the limits of common knowledge. This statement is an example of the consistent categorization and stereotypical presentation of women. Some would argue that Dorothy's presentation as missile adds richness to the text, others would claim the reference has destroyed any reasonable presentation of a warhead or woman named Dorothy. While many historians might respond to this statement with pleas for more specificity concerning how and why the subject ventured to the supermarket, a postmodern historian could very well respond with questions relating to the way "walking carefully" — both the language and action — has played an active role in the shaping of the modern mind.

Of course, it is possible that the postmodern historian would deny the ability of the statement or its denial to transmit any functional knowledge whatsoever — a rare commonality in an otherwise diverse field: attempted suicide. The evolution of postmodern theory has maintained a direct impact on the study and presentation of history, and the postmodern assault on traditional historical archetypes is valuable and fundamental to the discipline as a whole. Despite its best efforts, postmodernism hasn't killed itself just yet.

Arnold Toynbee's 1947 A Study of History was the first historical work to receive a "post-modern" label, though not conforming to any current postmodern definition. Toynbee was actually firmly ensconced behind the rubric of "modernism," a concept essential to understanding

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the later variant. "Modernism" describes the late-nineteenth century mindset that questioned Enlightenment concepts of order, decency, and social justice without altering the ideals of reason, progress, and absolute truth.[1] Albert Einstein's theory of relativity and Pablo Picasso's Still Life With Mandolin, for example, demonstrated to the world that fundamental deviations could be made to the modern worldview without sacrificing the concept of linear forward movement. Indeed, innovations in science and art, as well as the economic growth brought by the Industrial Revolution, virtually confirmed that change was occurring to the benefit of progressive, tangible goals.

If modernism, still prominent in Western thought, claims dissent and innovation within the Enlightenment boundary, postmodernism exists not only as a challenge to that dissent and innovation, but to the boundary itself. Architects of the 1960s first challenged this boundary by responding to the purity and industrial formalism of modern buildings with eclectic, playful creations that referenced many styles, textures, and forms.[2] Eventually, postmodernism moved into virtually every intellectual discipline, originally spreading to linguistic philosophy and literary theory. History, in so many aspects a forum for the amalgamation of philosophy and literature, found influence from the new concepts following their presence in the former two disciplines.

True historical postmodernism developed in France, but may best be initially understood in the work of German thinker Frank R. Ankersmit. By no means an original founder of the postmodern movement, Ankersmit's three most important contributions to the historiography came in the 1980s and 90s, beginning with Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language in 1983 and closing with the multi-author A New Philosophy of History in 1995, which he edited with Hans Kellner. In-between these book-length contributions, Ankersmit published an article entitled "Historiography and Postmodernism" that attempted to delineate a clear postmodern philosophical approach to the study of history. Borrowing, as many postmodernists have, from Nietzsche's conceptualization of the vulnerability of traditional frameworks of causality and Wittgenstein's suggestion of inherent untruth in the product of reason, Ankersmit argues that historical

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[1] Arnold Toynbee, A Study of History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947); and Glenn Ward, Postmodernism (Chicago: NTC Publishing Group, 1997), 6, 8.

[2] Ward, Postmodernism, 15-20. See also, Dianne Harris, "The Postmodernization of the Landscape: A Critical Historiography," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 58 (1999): 434-443.

interpretations only gain their identity through recognition of other interpretations. In effect, "they are what they are only on the basis of what they are not."[3]

Postmodern historical work highlights the inherent paradox and irony imbedded in the realm of historiography. The written past is a linguistic edifice with the same properties as any other text. Histories, like novels, present an illusion of reality, making all truth statements contingent upon that reality. For all the postmodern difference, surely one blatant commonality is the belief that "content is a derivative of style."[4]

Postmodernism denies the ability of the historian to know if a grand narrative exists in reality and tends to discourage the practice of forming arguments in such a coercive way. Parallel to this argument is the denial of historical writing's ability to represent an actual historical past at all. Naturally in such a framework, rationality becomes moral rhetoric and a hindrance to richer understanding of the past. Virulent skepticism quickly replaces rationality, and language-based rhetorical argument supplements archival fact-finding to further enhance that understanding. The result of this continued denial and counter-argument is an all-encompassing relativism and firm belief in the contingency of virtually all knowledge.[5] Teleology is therefore rendered obsolete — replaced with a discursive hermeneutics that often confuses more than it elucidates.

It is important to note, however, that postmodernism, as a philosophical and historical discourse, takes on a variety of meanings, and postmodern thinkers often disagree with each other as much as they

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[3] F.R. Ankersmit, Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1983); Frank Ankersmit and Hans Kellner, eds., A New Philosophy of History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); and F.R. Ankersmit, "Historiography and Postmodernism," History and Theory 28 (May 1989): 137-153, 142.

[4] Ankersmit, "Historiography and Postmodernism," 143-44.

[5] Dorothy Ross, "Grand Narrative in American Historical Writing: From Romance to Uncertainty," The American Historical Review 100 (June 1995): 673; Richard J. Evans, "From Historicism to Postmodernism: Historiography in the Twentieth Century," review of Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge, by Georg G. Iggers, History and Theory 41 (February 2002): 80, 86; Alan Megill and Donald N. McCloskey, "The Rhetoric of History," in The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences: Language and Argument in Scholarship and Public Affairs, ed. John S. Nelson, Allan Megill, and Donald N. McCloskey (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 221-222, 28; and Richard Rorty, "Postmodernist Bourgeois Liberalism," The Journal of Philosophy 80 (October 1983): 586, 589.

disagree with their Enlightenment-influenced counterparts. For this reason, attempts at synthesis must remain relatively vague.[6] The historiography of postmodern work itself can elaborate on these initial concepts and create a more accurate picture of the discipline. While the influence of Ankersmit, Nietzsche, and Wittgenstein (and, for that matter, Heidegger, Habermas, and Freud) are vital to understanding postmodern concepts, the history of postmodern theory is firmly grounded in France.[7]

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[6] While a historiographical essay naturally attempts to show the differences as well as the inherent commonalities within the postmodern realm, there have been non-historiographical attempts made to synthesize the relevant arguments and make them more understandable and coherent—to begin a process of creating "rules" for this field of inquiry. While these works do not practice postmodern theory, they do attempt to explain it and offer further reference. See Jonathan Arac, ed., Postmodernism and Politics (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); Robert F. Berkhoffer, Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations (New York: The Guilford Press, 1991); David Hackett Fischer, Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought (New York: Harper and Row, 1970); David Goodman, "Postmodernism and History," American Studies International 31 (1993): 17-23; Richard Harland, Superstructuralism: The Philosophy of Structuralism and Post-Structuralism (London: Methuen, 1987); David A. Hollinger, "The Return of the Prodigal: The Persistence of Historical Knowing," The American Historical Review 94 (June 1989): 610-21; Linda Hutcheon, "Beginning to Theorize Postmodernism," Textual Practice 1 (1987): 26; Linda Hutcheon, The Politics of Postmodernism (London: Routledge, 1987); Keith Jenkins, "A Postmodern Reply to Perez Zagorin," History and Theory 39 (May 2000): 181-200; Keith Jenkins, ed. The Postmodern History Reader (New York: Routledge, 1997); Frank Lentricchia, After the New Criticism (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980); John McGowan, Postmodernism and Its Critics (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Mark Poster, Cultural History and Postmodernity: Disciplinary Readings and Challenges (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); David Gary Shaw, "Happy In Our Chains? Agency and Language in the Postmodern Age," History and Theory 40 (December 2001): 1-9; and American Studies 36 (Spring 1995). This list is by no means complete, but represents what the author can verify as valuable syntheses.

[7] Heidegger, who examined the submerged meaning in texts and the possibility of textual self-contradiction, generally becomes a reference and base of expansion for postmodern discourse. Postmodernists often call upon the modernism of Habermas, complete with its search for universal consensus, as juxtaposition to their own views. For Freud's influence, see discussion of Lacan below.

Turn of the century philosopher Ferdinand de Sassure is the generally acknowledged founder of modern linguistics and structuralist theory. Course in General Linguistics, published posthumously in 1915, argued that individual words are simply arbitrary functions of language with no tangible reference to actual objects, thereby denying the presence of truth and accurate representation in language. Semiotics, Sassure's hallmark theoretical discourse, argues that signifiers (i.e. words, letters, objects, etc.) only arbitrarily relate to the signified (i.e. concept, image, etc., called up by the signifier). These signs, or signifiers, are only constrained by language, and hence have far more meaning than intended by the producer of the original sign. Sassure examined the relationship between langue, or language system, and parole, or individual speech.[8] These terms have since become synonymous with the linguist, and through his work, structuralism maintained its search for the source of representational meaning and knowledge.

Jacques Lacan borrowed this structuralist approach for application to a linguistic psychoanalysis that spanned the 1940s, 50s, 60s, and 70s, attempting to enhance Freudian approaches to the human mind. A linguistic approach to Freud's texts allowed Lacan to subvert formal Freudian structure in favor of a more liberated model. He argued for the tangible benefit of viewing the unconscious as a language structure. Each retain metaphor and metonymy, each feature a series of symbols and signifiers for representation, and the human mind itself acts as the necessary fuel of the modern state.[9] Naturally, psychoanalytic ideas such as Lacan's have vast implications for historians, especially in relation to causality and the nature of power. Understanding the role of the signifier in the historical mind allows for more lucid interpretations of the past.

Roland Barthes was a French literary theorist who published his major works in the 1960s and 70s. Barthes applied Sassure's structuralism to literary texts in an attempt to apply science to a discipline previously viewed strictly as art. In works such as Elements of Semiology and Critical Essays, Barthes demonstrated that signs

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[8] Ferdinand de Sassure, Course in General Linguistics (New York: Philosophical Library, 1915); Ward, Postmodernism, 82-88; and Edith Kurzweil, "Structuralist Psychoanalysis," review of Écrits, by Jacques Lacan, Partisan Review 45 (1978): 642.

[9] Jacques Lacan, Écrits: A Selection, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1977); Kurzweil, "Structuralist Psychoanalysis," 642-646; Review of Écrits: A Selection, by Jacques Lacan, Forum for Modern Language Studies 14 (April 1978): 187; and Richard King, review of Écrits, by Jacques Lacan, and Life and Death in Psychoanalysis, by Jean Laplanche, The Georgia Review 32 (Winter 1978): 927.

imbedded in texts could be evaluated for truth statements.[10] This structuralist approach to texts demonstrates a formula for the detection of truth absent in the thought of ensuing French thinkers. In Barthes' understanding of literature, texts themselves were agents, demonstrating that historical source material could be the cause, as well as the representation, of historical events.

Postmodernists understandably rely on such Sassurian concepts as a staging ground for new arguments. Poststructuralism, the postmodern evolution of Sassure's semiotics, retains the majority of structuralist thought, but argues that there is no underlying structure of meaning sustaining the world of signifiers propagated by language. All texts, according to theories of poststructuralist signification, are incomplete and contradictory and condition the signified to a state of satisfaction with current conditions. Postmodernists opened the semiotic closed system and argued that meaning, while not dead, could never be fully complete.[11]

Jean Baudrillard's world of signs follows this poststructuralist model, modifying Sassure's semiotics to criticize media culture. Baudrillard demonstrates how the grammar of the modern age leads to a simulated reality. Images have been over-represented, and therefore only refer to other representations. These images become referenced in response to signifiers, and representations that represent representations are not based in reality, thereby creating a false world of nothing but baseless symbols. While Baudrillard's Simulations, The Evil Demon of Images, and America all contain relevant concepts for postmodern historians, perhaps his most representative text is Selected Writings. The over-development of signs takes precedence in Selected Writings, arguing that signifiers with no valid referents lead to a solipsistic society.[12]

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[10] Roland Barthes, Elements of Semiology, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (London: Cape, 1967); Roland Barthes, Critical Essays, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972); and B.R. McGraw, "Barthes's The Pleasure of the Text: An Erotics of Reading," review of The Pleasure of the Text, by Roland Barthes, Boundary 2 5 (Spring 1977): 943-944. See also Roland Barthes, A Barthes Reader, ed. Susan Sontag (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

[11] Ward, Postmodernism, 90-92.

[12] Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writings, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); Ian Whitehouse, review of Selected Writings, by Jean Baudrillard, Modern Language Review 85 (October 1990): 989; Ward, Postmodernism, 60-68; and Steven Helmling, review of Selected Writings, by Jean Baudrillard, The Kenyon Review 11 (Winter 1990): 204-206.

Jean-Francois Lyotard's career ran concurrent to Baudrillard's, the apex of both culminating in the mid to late-1980s. Lyotard, in his The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, argues that the mind cannot fully legitimate knowledge. He launches an attack on grand narrative, representing the form as inefficient in attempting to reveal a full truth. Unlike his counterpart Baudrillard, Lyotard acknowledges an underlying truth, but maintains that it is beyond the control of human endeavor. Truth, as discovered in texts, is elusive and only incurred indirectly. Lyotard maintains that every textual reading is a de facto rereading. In essence, information gained in the search for historical truth is merely a series of representations. Those representations, however, are the closest possible manifestations of full truth and, therefore, worth the effort. Such an interpretation validates the importance of reading, but, like Baudrillard, signals the invalidity of consensus.[13]

When words, sentences, ideas, and abstraction replace actions and the assurance of truth as the model component of history, metaphor and the contingency of meaning create interesting problems. When metaphor becomes a signifier of other simple signifiers, metaphor as referenced in common vernacular becomes non-existent and historically inaccurate.

Paul Ricoeur's intellectual career ran concurrent to those of his French counterparts Baudrillard and Lyotard. He argued in the semiotic structuralist tradition that metaphor could indeed convey truth when properly applied, and in the process he moved metaphor from its traditional rhetorical sphere. Ricoeur differentiates between poetic and philosophical discourse, but denies the logical empiricist notion that poetic discourse (and thus metaphor) cannot confer truth statements. In The Rule of Metaphor, Ricoeur qualifies his position by acknowledging the fundamental difference between the semiotics of words and the semantics of discourse. Semantics, argues Ricoeur, treats sentences, which can reach beyond the structural limits of language and reach

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[13] Jean-Francois Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Masumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); J. Sch., review of The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, by Jean-Francois Lyotard, Ethics 95 (July 1985): 976-77; John W. Murphy, review of The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, by Jean-Francois Lyotard, The International Philosophical Quarterly 26 (September 1986): 305-307; and Karlis Racevskis, review of The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, by Jean-Francois Lyotard, Philosophy and Literature 10 (April 1986): 124. See also Mark Conroy, review of The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, by Jean-Francois Lyotard, Southern Humanities Review 19 (Fall 1985): 375-76.

individual truths.[14] In a series of lectures at Texas Christian University in 1973, Ricoeur described a concept of the metaphor that not only discovered meaning, but also created new meaning. Transferring meaning to a representative subject, in this case a metaphor, counter-transfers meaning back to the original source. Therefore, a comparison becomes two unique value statements able to exist independently of one another. By acknowledging the surplus of meaning generated by metaphor, historians can avoid the pitfalls of subjectivity.[15]

Philosopher Hilary Putnam elaborated on the Franco-dominated postmodern historical theory throughout the second half of the twentieth century, primarily addressing the representation of mental and computational states in language. In Representation and Reality, Putnam argues that spoken, computational language and its mental, cerebral equivalent cannot be adequately described by the sciences. The rules of "nature," "reference," "meaning," and "intent" must necessarily be flexible because these concepts are malleable discourses variously known and defined, rather than set entities. In effect, assuming the purpose of the act makes the entire description of the act an assumption, thereby invalidating it. Putnam acknowledges the presence of intentionality, but urges that historical purpose can only be fundamentally understood at face value.[16] This concept allows for a

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[14] Paul Ricoeur, The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language, trans. Robert Czerny (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977); Peter Lamarque, review of The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language, by Paul Ricoeur, Philosophical Quarterly 29 (April 1979): 189; J.J.A. Mooij, review of The Rule of Metaphor: Multidisciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language, by Paul Ricoeur, The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 37 (Summer 1979): 496-97; and Monroe C. Beardsley, "Demystifying Metaphor," review of The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language, by Paul Ricoeur, University of Toronto Quarterly 49 (Fall 1979): 80-81. See also Dominick LaCapra, "Who Rules Metaphor?" review of The Rule of Metaphor, by Paul Ricoeur, Diacritics 10 (December 1980): 15-28.

[15] Texas Christian University published the series of lectures in book form in 1976 as Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976); George J. Stack, review of Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning, by Paul Ricoeur, Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 39 (December 1978): 290-291; and George McFadden, review of Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning, by Paul Ricoeur, The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 36 (Spring 1978): 365-366.

[16] Hilary Putnam, Representation and Reality (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988); Jeff Foss, review of Representation and Reality, by Hilary Putnam, Canadian

tenuous grasp on agency, but, like Ricoeur, Putnam affirms the possibility of reaching truth statements. While concepts and definitions remain variable, the existing language offers the ability to come to logical, final conclusions.

For Richard Rorty, inheritor of the linguistic legacies of Ricoeur and Putnam, truth is both functional and temporary. Truths are contingent upon sentences, which are contingent upon languages, which are contingent upon history. Understanding, in essence, is relative to a specific time and place, and the language of that time and place is so singular as to be fundamentally unknowable to later examiners. Rorty separates himself from his forbears by making the search for truth singular to the described event, allowing that focused study will render individual knowledge of historical facts, but effectively removing the possibility of universal understanding. As historians recognize truths based on historical situations, historical actors are equally unable to divine all-encompassing truths for future generations. Rorty envisions a world were every fact is contingent on language. While the sentences are static, the discourses are dynamic and become incoherent for future readers.[17] Rorty's contingency theories, like the theories of many others in many disciplines, inherited their intellectual base from Jacques Derrida.

Sassurian semiotic structuralism's evolution into poststructuralism evolved, in turn, into deconstruction, the creation of French philosopher Jacques Derrida. From the 1960s to the 1990s, Derrida wrote extensively concerning the unstable relation of texts to linguistic meaning. Deconstruction borrows the self-regulating linguistic system of semiotics, and, like poststructuralism, places the mode of representation as the prime motivator of meaning, thereby disavowing the causality of intention. In other words, the method of conveyance of any idea, be it written language, pantomime, or drafted rendering, will determine the idea's meaning, rather than the intention of the conveyor. However, Derrida explains that modern argument is based on the contradiction of underlying truth. With a language based on either/or statements and the juxtaposition of opposites, all texts can receive an infinite number of interpretations. With limitless possibilities for social and historical

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Philosophical Reviews 8 (December 1988): 491-494; and Marianne Talbot, review of Representation and Reality, by Hilary Putnam, Mind 98 (July 1989): 453.

[17] L.P. Gerson, "Philosophy, Literature and Truth," review of Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, by Richard Rorty, University of Toronto Quarterly 59 (Spring 1990): 449-450; and David R. Lachterman, "Post-Modernist Reverberations," review of Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, by Richard Rorty, Clio 18 (Winter 1989): 393-395.

specific conditions of knowledge, actual meaning moves from the transitory to the non-existent. The instability of the foundations of knowledge devalues the truth claims based on that knowledge. Coupled with this problem is the absence of the author. Without authorial presence to verify causality, the text becomes further devalued, leading to a promotion of the superiority of speaking over the written word.[18]

Derrida's Of Grammatology argues that language forms have played a far more important role in the history of philosophical discourse than have forms of reason. A reader's imposition of referents upon a text always nullifies an author's intentions, and the limitless possibilities lead to an uncertainty of understanding. Derrida attempts to show the difficulty of comprehension when signifiers represent themselves and their opposite at the same time (i.e., the author's representation and the reader's representation).[19] At a Johns Hopkins University symposium on structuralism in 1967, Derrida told his audience, "I don't believe that there is any perception."[20]

Perhaps Derrida's most strident historical supporter is intellectual historian Dominick LaCapra. Intellectual history, to LaCapra, is the history of "situated uses of language." In such a conception, skills in textual analysis then become integral to historical scholarship. Context is an artificial construction, and historians must understand the shifting contextual references of historical texts before attempting to decipher and report any available historical discourse. Above all, the search to present order from the chaos of history is an injustice to the intellectual historical field. Chaos, in LaCapra's interpretation, justifies itself. Proper

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[18] Ward, Postmodernism, 94, 96-97, 99-100; and Norman J. Wilson, "Postmodernist (Re)Visions," in History in Crisis? Recent Directions in Historiography (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), 115.

[19] Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); Daniel O'Hara, review of Of Grammatology, by Jacques Derrida, The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 36 (Spring 1978): 361-364; and Roland A. Champagne, review of Of Grammatology, by Jacques Derrida, French Review 51 (April 1978): 742. See also Joseph N. Riddel, "Re-doubling the Commentary," Contemporary Literature 20 (Spring 1979): 237-250.

[20] Speeches presented at the symposium later appeared in book form. Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man, eds. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 272. For further elaboration on Derridian concepts of perception and other later areas of concern, see Jacques Derrida, Margins of Philosophy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

textual analysis allows for a relevant discourse between past and present and a better understanding of both.[21]

LaCapra demonstrates this textual analysis in "Madame Bovary" on Trial, detailing Flaubert's indecency trial after the publication of his adulterous novel Madame Bovary. LaCapra uses the trial to demonstrate the indeterminacy of meaning in literature and the social and political environments that judge their own conceptions of that meaning. History not only becomes an interpretation of an event, but also an interpretation of the text that based the event.[22] LaCapra, like Derrida before him, is free to deconstruct the novel, as well as the historical implications it created by its presence and indeterminate meaning.

The French philosopher whose work had the greatest impact on the postmodern historical discipline, however, is Michel Foucault, who steadily produced from the 1960s until his death in 1984. The majority of his work focused on a variety of social institutions and concepts and their relation to communal power. He shares his fellow postmodernists' suspicion of universal truths and absolute certainty and argues for categorical specificity in order to avoid over-generalization. Foucault refuses to sentimentalize the past, significantly narrowing his conception of relevant thinkers to certain "founders of discursivity," such as Sartre, Marx, and Freud. While the work of these authors may be somewhat flawed, the originality of their ideas reformed the boundary of legitimate discourse and therefore remains relevant.[23]

Foucault's primary concern is the objectification of the subject, historically demonstrated in three significant ways. Society creates

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[21] Dominick LaCapra, Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); Stanley Pierson, review of Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language, by Dominick LaCapra, Comparative Literature 37 (Fall 1985): 359-361; and Larry Shiner, review of Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language, by Dominick LaCapra, Clio 14 (Fall 1984): 102. See also Suzanne Gearhart, "History as Criticism: The Dialogue of History and Literature," Diacritics 17 (Fall 1987): 56-65; and Peter de Bolla, "Disfiguring History," Diacritics 16 (Winter 1986): 49-58.

[22] Dominick LaCapra, "Madame Bovary" on Trial (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982); and Ross Chambers, review of "Madame Bovary" on Trial, by Dominick LaCapra, MLN 97 (December 1982): 1251-1254. See also Brian Nelson, review of "Madame Bovary" on Trial, by Dominick LaCapra, Nineteenth-Century French Studies 12 (Fall/Winter 1983/84): 234-236.

[23] Ward, Postmodernism, 127; and Paul Rabinow, "Introduction," in The Foucault Reader, Paul Rabinow, ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 5-7, 23-27 [hereinafter cited as Rabinow, The Foucault Reader].

"dividing practices" in the first objectification example, exemplified in the Foucault books Madness and Civilization, The Birth of the Clinic, and Discipline and Punish. Through intervention of a science or organization, the discourse of society excludes and divides subjects from the rest of the community. Madness and Civilization and The Birth of the Clinic demonstrate the separating powers of medical definitions, while Discipline and Punish notes the rise of specification in the control and punishment of criminal activity, directly correlating these disciplinary practices to the rise of industrial capitalism and revealing Foucault's Marxist debt.[24]

"Scientific classification" objectifies the subject by providing definitions such as "poor," "necessary," or "productive," as can be seen in Foucault's The Order of Things and The Archaeology of Knowledge. Linguists, sociologists, and historians create a categorizing image of a stereotypical being when employing classifying terms such as "rich" or "insane." Of course, subjects can objectify themselves through self-definition and formation in a third process, dubbed "subjectification."[25] The History of Sexuality provides the best example of this self-governing discipline and highlights a major Foucaultian corollary to the concept of objectification of the subject—societal discourse.

Discourse, in Foucault's conception, can stem from a societal institution or a simple series of representations. Often a combination of language, disciplinary practices, or institutions, discourses are regulated yet malleable systems of communal understanding that have the power to legitimate or shun various actions and statements. The power of these systems, or, more precisely, the manipulation of these systems to wield power, comprised the bulk of Foucault's fascination. Various discourses

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[24] Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965); Michel Foucault, The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973); Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977); and Rabinow, The Foucault Reader, 8-11.

[25] Michel Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970); Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972); Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, vol. 1, An Introduction (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, vol. 2, The Use of Pleasure (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985); Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, vol. 3, The Care of the Self (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986); and Rabinow, The Foucault Reader, 8-11.

are always present, often overlapping, and are the primary mediators of life.[26]

While Foucault's influence is evident across the historiographical landscape in the early twenty-first century, the primary heirs to Foucaultian discourse theory are the feminist historians of the United States, who demonstrate how various American societal discourses have been used to subjugate women and hinder their upward mobility. A fundamental example of this application is Manliness and Civilization, by Gail Bederman.[27] Concepts of "manliness" and "masculinity" in turn-of-the-century America become elements of a larger discourse of manliness, manipulated by its practitioners to influence popular opinion concerning race and gender. Whether railing against lynching or in favor of domesticity as a method to preserve the white race, speakers invoked the discourse of manliness to bolster their arguments.[28] Linguistic analysis of the discourse of civilization, however, necessarily retains a debt of gratitude to Sassurian semiotics, as well.

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[26] Ward, Postmodernism, 129. For elaboration on Foucaultian discourse theory, see Gerard Noiriel, "Foucault and History: The Lessons of a Disillusion," The Journal of Modern History 66 (September 1994): 547-568; Peter Kemp, review of Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, History and Theory 23 (February 1984): 84-105; and Allan Megill, "Recent Writing on Michel Foucault," The Journal of Modern History 56 (September 1984): 499-511. Each of these articles also contains references to book-length volumes on Foucault's work.

[27] Gail Bederman, Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1800-1917 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). While Bederman's book demonstrates an example of discourse theory in feminist history, it is by no means the only example. See Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990); Denise Riley, Am I That Name? Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History (New York: Macmillan, 1988); Joan Wallach Scott, Gender and the Politics of History (New York: Columbia University Press, 1888); Thomas Laqueur, Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Peter G. Filene, Him/Her/Self: Sex Roles in Modern America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); Donna Harraway, Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science (New York: Routledge, 1989); Mary Poovey, Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); and Judith Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[28] Bederman, Manliness and Civilization, 24, 44.

While statistics are unavailable for the entire global historical community, The Journal of American History surveyed its membership at the end of 1993 as to influences on historical method and discovered that none of its almost ten thousand members listed Jacques Derrida as inspiration. Michel Foucault's name appeared in a negligible minority of responses.[29] It is probably accurate to say that Foucault's influence is continuing to grow more rapidly than Derrida's in the realm of history. The continued evolution of historical thought, however, has secured a place for linguistic analysis, whatever its form, in the study of history for years to come.

Of course, postmodernist thought continues to have detractors from all sides of the political and historical spectrum. Conservative historian Elizabeth Fox-Genovese argues that text-centered historical studies abandon narrative, replacing it with uncritical theory that doesn't accurately explain the era it attempts to represent.[30] Liberal historians often cite the fact that much postmodern theory abandons Marxist optimism and the search for the utopian other. Historians such as Francis Fukuyama further enflame the Left's anti-postmodernism by claiming the death of challenges, designs, or plots against established order—and therefore the death of History as a static and viable discipline—because of the overwhelming completeness of democratic capitalism. Fukuyama argues that the human need for triumph secured the capitalist position, and future alternatives are no longer possible to postulate. Non-political challenges also arise, often arguing that a closed linguistic system does not allow for alternative causes of change, such as human agency, economics, or weather.[31]

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[29] Results of the survey, as well as commentary, appeared in a special issue of The Journal of American History 81 (December 1994). See Thomas Bender, "'Venturesome and Cautious': American History in the 1990s," The Journal of American History 81 (December 1994): 992-1003; David Thelen, "The Practice of American History," The Journal of American History 81 (December 1994): 933-960; and Appendix 3, The Journal of American History 81 (December 1994): 1203-1213.

[30] See Jenkins, The Postmodern History Reader.

[31] Francis Fukuyama, The End of History and the Last Man (New York: Free Press, 1992); Peter Fritzsche, review of The End of History and the Last Man, by Francis Fukuyama, The American Historical Review 97 (June 1992): 817-819; Jerald Hage and Rogers Hollingsworth, "The End of History, or a New Crisis?" review of The End of History and the Last Man, by Francis Fukuyama, Contemporary Sociology 22 (March 1993): 199-200; and John A. Hall, review of The End of History and the Last Man, by Francis Fukuyama, American Journal of Sociology 98 (May 1993): 1523. See also, Michael L. Fitzhugh and William H.

Through challenges, self-contradictions, and the popular belief in causality, postmodernism has made a place for itself in the historiography of the discipline by borrowing from a variety of related concepts and continually evolving from a Sassurian linguistic base. That evolution not only describes the historiography of the postmodern past, but also argues for the continued elaboration of postmodern theories in the historical field. In essence, whether or not Dorothy ever arrives at the supermarket, her journey will continue to receive analysis within an increasing number of theoretical frameworks attempting to arrive at the tangible significance of her journey.

Or the journey's lack of significance...

Or the journey's actual existence...

Ad infinitum.

Leckie, Jr., "Agency, Postmodernism, and the Causes of Change," History and Theory 40 (December 2001): 59-81; and Shaw, "Happy In Our Chains? Agency and Language in the Postmodern Age," 1-9.